Title: Case study methodology

Author: Grażyna Kiliańska-Przybyło

Citation style: Kiliańska-Przybyło Grażyna. (2011). Case study methodology. W: D. Gabryś-Barker (red.), "Action research in teacher development: an overview of research methodology" (s. 159-184). Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego.

Grażyna Kiliańska-Przybyło
University of Silesia

Case study methodology

1. The case study — definition and characteristic features

Defining the case study is not an easy task. Nunan (1992: 74) points out that methodologically speaking the case study is 'a hybrid' consisting of a range of methods for collecting and analysing data, rather than being restricted to a single procedure. Łobocki (2006: 305) shares a similar view. He claims that the case study is not a separate method but an approach based on various techniques. Below, three widely available definitions of the case study are presented:

> Case study — the intensive study of an aspect of behaviour, either at one period in time or over a long period of time, e.g. the language development of a child over one year. The case study method provides an opportunity to collect detailed information which may not be observable using other research techniques (compare cross-section(al) method), and is usually based on the assumption that the information gathered on a particular individual, group, community etc., will also be true of the other individuals, groups or communities (Richards, Platt and Platt 1992: 47).

> Case study (or history) — the detailed account of a single individual. Most often used in psychotherapy, where as complete a record of a single person as possible is compiled, including personal history, background, test results, ratings, interviews, etc. In clinical psychology and psychiatry,

disciplines which were originally non-experimental in their approach, case studies have often become the basis for generalized theoretical principles (Reber and Reber 2001: 106).

1. Case study research comprises an intensive study of the background, current status, and environmental interactions of a given social unit: an individual, a group, an institution, or a community, while
2. Developmental research comprises an investigation of patterns and sequences of growth and change as a function of time (Brown and Rodgers 2002: 21).

These definitions stress various dimensions of the term. The first definition focuses on the possibility of generalizing the findings, the second one concentrates on the application of the method and techniques used to collect the data. Finally, the third one highlights some possible variables that need to be taken into consideration in the course of research as well as the nature of the research process. These definitions, however, do not exhaust the issue. An extensive literature review allows one to enumerate the following characteristics of the case study:

- A case study is a specific, holistic, often unique instance that is frequently designed to illustrate a more general principle (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2006).
- It is an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single entity (Merriam 1988: 16, quoted in Nunan 1992: 77).
- A case study refers to a longitudinal approach characterized by at least three of the qualitative paradigm attributes: naturalistic (use of spontaneous speech), process-oriented (it takes place over time) and ungeneralizable (very few subjects) (Larsen, Freeman and Long 1991: 11—12, quoted in Nunan 1992: 76). The last feature (i.e. ungeneralizable), however, needs to be treated with caution (consider the definition by Richards, Platt and Platt presented above).
- It is a contextualized study, which means that research is carried out in the naturalistic environment of the case/student. It needs to be clarified that contexts involved in the case study may be temporal, physical, organizational, institutional, interpersonal.
- The study of 'an instance in action'. As Nunan (1992: 75) explains, 'one selects an instance from the class of objects and phenomena one is investigating (for example, "a second language learner" or "a science classroom") and investigates the way this instance functions in a context.'
- The study of an evolving situation (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2006).
- The case study is often developmental in nature. Brown and Rodgers (2002: 21) claim that in language education research, case studies often

involve following the development of the language competence of an individual or small group of individuals.

- The case study is characterized by rich, vivid and holistic description ('thick description') and portrayal of events, contexts and situations through the eyes of participants (including the researcher). It is more interesting in human terms than statistical research (Wallace 1998: 164).
- The focus is on actors and participants.
- The case study is idiosyncratic; it concentrates on what is unique (Wallace 1998: 161).
- It belongs to the qualitative research tradition, however, it contains a mix of qualitative and quantitative measures.
- There is a chronological narrative of the data.
- Case studies are best used for intensive investigation of complex situations where there are many interacting variables (Child 2007: 551). Wallace (1998: 164) enumerates some possible aims of case study research, namely: solving problems; applying theories to practice; generating hypotheses and providing illustrations.
- Case studies draw on multiple sources of evidence and information. According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2006), data in case studies are derived from: observations (structured to unstructured); field notes; interviews (structured to unstructured); various documents; numbers. Łobocki (2006: 305) enumerates the following techniques for collecting data: conversation and interview, document analysis, analysis of works produced by the subject, participant observation and sometimes psychological tests. According to Łobocki (2006: 305), another useful procedure implemented in case studies is the portfolio containing background information about the student and his/her works. The portfolio is gradually expanded and supplemented with the information added by the teachers or other people involved.
- Case study research implies the combination of description, analysis and interpretation. However, Richards and Farrell (2005: 128) claim that the case study involves a detailed description of a situation, but the researcher does not necessarily analyse or interpret it. The case thus becomes the data for analysis and interpretation by the reader. In other words, as Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2006) put it: 'The principle behind the case study is to let the data speak for themselves (don't over-interpret)'.
- It can be an instructive example for other teachers (Richards and Farrell 2005: 128).
- It focuses on an instance or example of something we wish to learn more about (Richards and Farrell 2005: 128). It is more accessible to the

practising professional (Wallace 1998: 161). Reichelt (2000: 346) says that the case study represents so-called 'teacher research', defined as a systematic, intentional inquiry by teachers' interest in the problems of practice.
- Case studies have implications beyond the situation described (Richards and Farrell 2005: 128).

1.1. What is a case?

Case study research focuses on either individuals or well-defined groups such as a family, school or community. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2006) specify what constitutes a case:
- A person (e.g. an individual teacher — Nunan 1992: 76).
- A group (e.g. group dynamics within a classroom — Nunan 1992: 76).
- An organization (e.g. summer intensive language learning program at a university; a classroom or a school district — Nunan 1992: 76)
- An event (e.g. a Japanese language tutorial... where one could examine the amount of time a teacher speaks in either Japanese or English for class management purposes — Duff 1990: 35, quoted in Nunan 1992: 76).

Nunan (1992: 76) adds that a case can be also a construct, such as an innovative teaching program. Łobocki (2006: 304—305) is of the opinion that the case study is implemented to examine students with specific needs, deviant or anti-social behaviour who need extra or modified treatment. Thus, a case is often associated with an individual requiring special treatment.

Yin (2003: 10) draws attention to two terms, which are frequently confused, namely: case study teaching and case study research. The former refers to the materials or situations which are deliberately modified to highlight some important issues or to present some problems more effectively (the value of these case studies has been thoroughly described by Reichelt 2000, who uses them in L2 teacher education). The latter, however, requires a fair and objective description of the data (the example refers to longitudinal, intensive studies — see Section 6).

1.2. Types of case studies

As far as the purpose of the research is concerned, Yin (1984, quoted in Child 2007: 551—552) distinguishes 3 main types of case studies:

- **exploratory** — these can be used as pilot studies for larger projects. Tellis (1997a) says that exploratory case studies may be undertaken prior to the definition of the research questions and hypotheses, as a prelude to some social research. Additionally, they are useful in determining and modifying the research tools that are to be administered in the research. Yin (1984, quoted in Child 2007: 551—552) provides the example of a study of teacher attitudes to the inclusion of pupils with special needs, conducted in one school, in which teachers are asked to complete questionnaires and take part in interviews. Feedback from this case study of one school is then used to plan a larger project involving a representative sample of schools from throughout the country.
- **descriptive** (e.g. narrative) — these provide narrative accounts of a particular case; often applicable in special education. Tellis (1997a) claims that this type of study focuses on the formation of hypotheses of cause-effect relationships. That is why the descriptive theory must cover the depth and scope of the case under study. The selection of cases and the unit of analysis are developed in the same manner as the other types of case studies. Yin (1984, quoted in Child 2007: 551—552) gives the example of a focused study of a teenage girl with anorexia nervosa, which details the development and treatment of the disorder over a period of years from the perspectives of her parents, teachers, and the girl herself. In language studies, descriptive case studies would refer, for example, to the in-depth description of two learners acquiring a second language and the detailed presentation of various factors connected with second language development.
- **explanatory** — these attempt to test hypotheses or theories using a single person or homogeneous group. Tellis (1997a) is of the opinion that explanatory cases are suitable for doing causal studies. For example, an intensive investigation following the exploratory example above might be used to track the effects of integrating students with disabilities into mainstream inclusive schools (Stakes and Hornby 2000, quoted in Child 2007: 552).

Stake (1988, quoted in Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2006) provides a slightly different typology:

- Intrinsic case studies: (to understand the case in question).
- Instrumental case studies (examining a particular case to gain insight into an issue or theory). Tellis (1997a) explains that instrumental case studies are used to understand more than what is obvious to the observer.
- Collective case studies (groups of individual studies to gain a fuller picture).

For Stenhouse (1983, quoted in Nunan 1992: 77—78) case studies can be divided into:

- neo-ethnographic — the in-depth investigation of a single case by a participant observer;
- evaluative — an investigation carried out in order to evaluate policy or practice;
- multi-site — a study carried out by several researchers on more that one site;
- teacher research (action) — an investigation carried out by a classroom practitioners in his or her professional context (classroom action research).

Yin (2004) focuses on the following types:

- single case study,
- multi-case study,
- holistic case study,
- embedded case study.

Nunan (1992: 81—82) discusses a single case study as a special type of case study, which shares some characteristics with the case study and experimental research (as some intervention takes place). The difference, however, lies in the fact that there are no experimental or control groups, as the study involves a single individual or a group. The behaviour of the subject or subjects is measured at two or more points in time. The author also claims (1992: 82) that single case research has been employed in areas such as psychology and speech pathology. In education, studies have been carried out to alter the classroom behaviour of children who are disruptive or who have specific learning or attitudinal problems.

Yin (2004) explains the difference between holistic and embedded case studies, namely: research into why a school system had implemented certain student promotion policies and the system's classrooms could serve as embedded 'sub-cases' from which you also collect data.

2. Case studies and other types of the research

Yin (1994, quoted in Walliman 2001: 228) compared the case study with other research methodologies in terms of forms of research questions, required control and focus on contemporary events. The findings are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Various types of research — comparison (source: Yin 1994, quoted in Walliman 2001: 228)

Strategy	Forms of research question	Requires control over behavior of event	Focuses on contemporary
Experimental	How, why What if?	Yes	Yes
Survey	Who, what, where How many, how much?	No	Yes
Archival analysis	Who, what, where How many, how much?	Yes/No	No
Historical	How, why?	No	No
Case study	How, why?	No	Yes

From the above comparison, we may assume that case studies typically take more of a qualitative than a quantitative approach, allowing participants to speak for themselves, thereby enabling the situation to be seen through the eyes of participants. Thus, the main source of information for case studies is usually based on interviews with key participants, but documentary evidence, questionnaire data, observational data, even information from standardized tests has been included (Child 2007: 551).

Yin (1994, quoted in Tellis 1997a, 1997b) is even more specific about primary sources of evidence for case study research and identifies six of them. However, he asserts that the use of each of these might require different skills from the researcher. Not all the sources are essential in every case study, but the importance of multiple sources of data to the reliability of the study is well established (Stake 1995; Yin 1994, quoted in Tellis 1997a). Another thing worth remembering is that no single source has a complete advantage over the others; rather, they might be complementary and could be used in tandem (Tellis 1997b).

The six sources identified by Yin (1994, quoted in Tellis 1997a, 1997b) are as follows:

- documentation, letters, memoranda, agendas, study reports, or any items that could add to the data base;
- archival records, service records, maps, charts, lists of names, survey data, and even personal records such as diaries;
- interviews, which constitute one of the most important sources of case study information. The interview could take one of several forms: open-ended, focused, or structured;
- direct observation, which occurs when the investigator makes a site visit to gather data. The observations could be formal or casual activities;

- participant observation, understood as a unique mode of observation in which the researcher may actually participate in the events being studied;
- physical artifacts, which could be defined as any physical evidence that might be gathered during a site visit. That might include tools, art works, notebooks, computer output, and other such physical evidence.

Flyvbjerg (2005: 65) claims that the value of quantitative methods (e.g. statistical studies) is their scope, the weakness relates to the depth of the analysis. With the case study, the situation is completely diverse. Yet, both approaches are needed in social studies.

Seliger and Shohamy (1989: 124—125) place case study approaches within descriptive research, especially in relation to second language acquisition. The example they provide concerns L2 performance or L2 development of one or more subjects as individuals. The authors claim that in such research the focus is on the thorough description of individual's linguistic performance as well as the frequency of occurrence of certain structures or behaviour. For Seliger and Shohamy (1989: 129), descriptive research in second language acquisition provides descriptions of naturally occurring phenomena connected with language development and processing. It does so by collecting data through non-intrusive and non-manipulative procedures. Seliger and Shohamy (1989: 124—125) contrast qualitative and descriptive research. The former is: synthetic/holistic, heuristic (not deductive, which means that few decisions, if any, are made before the research begins) and control low. At the same time, the latter is often more deductive than heuristic, and begins with preconceived hypotheses and a narrower scope of investigation. Because of that, descriptive research shares some of the qualities of experimental research and is often quantitative.

Brown and Rodgers (2002: 287) define the case study as an 'observation of the characteristics of an individual unit such as a person, a social group, a class, a school or a community'. However, we must bear in mind that the case study is more than observation. Adelman, Jenkins and Kemmis (1976, quoted in Nunan 1992: 74) state that 'a case study should not be equated with observational studies as this would rule out historical case studies.'

Nunan (1992: 75) points out that a case study might bear some resemblance to ethnographic research, especially in its philosophy, methods and context-based approach. Ethnographic research is commonly defined as a non-manipulative study of the cultural characteristics of a group in real-world rather than laboratory settings, utilizing ethnographic techniques and providing a sociocultural interpretation of the research data (Nunan

1992: 230). All of these features are also present in the case study. However, Nunan (1992: 75) stresses three main differences between these two types of research, namely: the scope, the focus and the type of applied research methods. The case study is more limited in scope than ethnography. Another difference is concerned with the focus: ethnography is mostly concerned with the cultural context and cultural interpretation of the phenomena under investigation. Finally, the case study can employ qualitative data and statistical methods (which makes it more descriptive — for details see: Seliger and Shohamy 1989, earlier in this section), unlike ethnography, which is based solely on qualitative field methods.

Richards and Farrell (2005: 129) contrast the case study with critical incident analysis. They claim that a case study differs from a critical incident in that it starts from identification of a particular issue or phenomenon and then selects a method for collecting information about it. Critical incident analysis involves looking back on an unplanned classroom incident and reflecting on its meaning. Cognitions and emotions are equally important in critical incident analysis. In contrast, a case study usually has a broader focus than a critical incident, though a critical incident can provide the initial motivation for a case study. A case study may require some amount of planning or planned intervention. According to Richards and Farrell (2005: 129—130), a case is defined as a narrative description of a real-life situation; a 'slice of life', that can provide a forum for teachers to explore issues that arise in real classrooms. Similarly, Yin (1984: 23, quoted in Nunan 1992: 76) claims that

> a case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used.

3. History of case study methodology

The pendulum metaphor describes well the history of case study research, as it is marked by periods of intense use and periods of disuse. This was determined by the emphasis of researchers either on quantitative or qualitative methods. Hamel *et al.* (1993, quoted in Tellis 1997a) asserted that if the case study was rejected, it was not so much because of its drawbacks, but due to the inappropriate and immature methodology of some disciplines (i.e. sociology). As the use of quantitative methods

advanced, the decline of the case study hastened. However, in the 1960s, researchers were becoming concerned about the limitations of quantitative methods. From that time on, a renewed interest in case study methodology could be observed.

Richards and Farrell (2005: 126) report that case analysis has a long history in fields such as business, law and medicine. For example, the Harward Law School has used case studies since 1870 (Carter and Unklesbay 1989, in Richards and Farrell 2005: 128). However, in language teaching the case study method was not used until the mid-1980s.

Jendrych and Wisniewska (2009) admit that the analysis of cases originates from the early 20th century (the 30s of the previous century to be more specific). Tellis (1997a) claims that the earliest use of this form of research can be traced to Europe, predominantly to France. In the United States, however, the method was most closely associated with the University of Chicago, Department of Sociology. According to Jendrych and Wisniewska (2009), the case study was firstly implemented in psychiatry as a means to describe and diagnose instances of diseases. Case studies have been exploited regularly in law education, business and second/foreign language education, particularly in ESP. They are used as a research method, a teaching method and a method of professional development.

4. Evaluation of case study methodology

The case study, like any research method, can be evaluated both positively and negatively.

4.1. Strengths of case studies

The strong points of case studies can be classified into some wider categories:

Nature of the study and type of data obtained

- The case study method is pertinent when it addresses a descriptive question (*what* happened?) or an explanatory question (*how* or *why* it happened?); in contrast, a well-designed experiment is needed to establish causal relationships (e.g. whether a new education programme

had improved student performance, and a survey may be better at telling you *how often* something has happened (Yin 2004);
- It is ideal when a holistic, in-depth investigation is needed (Feagin, Orum and Sjoberg 1991, in Tellis 1997a);
- The benefits of a case study are that apart from diagnosing and examining the behaviour/nature of the problem, it also presents some wider context (environmental or cultural). Nunan (1992: 76) highlights the fact that the case study is particularly characteristic of some areas of psychological research, such as clinical psychology, which focuses on abnormal (or antisocial) behaviour;
- It is rooted in real contexts;
- The case study regards context as a determinant of behaviour;
- It assumes that the whole is more than the sum of the parts (holism);
- It recognizes and accepts complexity, uniqueness and unpredictability;
- Case studies can represent a multiplicity of viewpoints, and can offer supporting or alternative interpretations (Adelman *et al*. 1976, quoted in Nunan 1992: 78);
- It offers multi-perspectival analyses. This means that the researcher considers not just the voice and perspective of the actors, but also of the relevant groups of actors and the interaction between them. This one aspect is a salient point in the characteristics that case studies possess. They give a voice to the powerless and voiceless. When sociological investigations present many studies of the homeless and powerless, they do so from the viewpoint of the 'elite' (Feagin, Orum and Sjoberg 1991, in Tellis 1997a);
- The case study offers a multitude of details, that enables a thorough understanding of the situation and focuses one's attention on details (Flyvbjerg 2005: 46).

Outcomes
- The case study is strong on reality (contextualized) and 'strong in reality' (i.e. likely to appeal to practitioners — Adelman *et al*. 1976, quoted in Nunan 1992: 78);
- It can establish cause and effect;
- It can focus on critical incidents;
- It leads to action (link to action research); a 'step into action' (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2006);
- The case study seems suitable for small-scale investigations (Nunan 1992: 88);
- It can permit generalizations and application to similar situations. One can generalize from a case, either about an instance, or from an instance to a class (Adelman *et al*. 1976, quoted in Nunan 1992: 78);

- It can provide a database of materials which may be reinterpreted by future researchers (Adelman *et al*. 1976, quoted in Nunan 1992: 78).

Practicality and simplicity (clarity)
- The case study is practicable (it can be done by a single researcher);
- Case studies can be put to immediate use for a variety of purposes (Adelman *et al*. 1976, quoted in Nunan 1992: 78);
- Case study data are usually more accessible than conventional research reports. As a result, they may serve multiple audiences (Adelman *et al*. 1976, quoted in Nunan 1992: 78);
- Case study data are written in an accessible style and are immediately intelligible;
- Cases are necessary to develop and extend one's knowledge and skills, which is indispensable to conducting further research (Flyvbjerg 2005: 46).

4.2. Drawbacks of case studies

Problems with case studies concern the following issues (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2006):
- Difficulty to organize the research;
- Limited generalizability;
- Problems of cross-checking;
- Risk of bias, selectivity and subjectivity;
- Flyvbjerg (2005: 64) claims that case studies may be arbitrary and subjective;
- Reliability of the gathered material and information is not guaranteed;
- Case studies require a certain predisposition and experience of the researcher to deal with the gathered data appropriately, otherwise they tend to reflect subjective judgement of the researcher.

Yin (1984, quoted in Nunan 1992: 80) argues that construct validity is especially problematic in case study research as it is difficult to develop a sufficiently operational set of measures and 'subjective' judgements are used to collect the data. Yin (1984: 38, quoted in Nunan 1992: 80) also claims that this is 'a concern only for causal or explanatory studies, where an investigator is trying to determine whether event x led to event y'. If the casual relationship between the variables is established incorrectly, without taking some other, potential variables into account, then the research design may fail to meet internal validity. However, Nunan (1992: 80) adds that internal validity (defined as the extent to which the researchers have really observed what they decided to observe and have addressed all the

critical observational data — Brown and Rodgers 2002: 44) is of concern in all types of research. For Guba and Lincoln (1981, quoted in Nunan 1992: 81) internal validity takes precedence over external validity because without internal validity results are meaningless.

Yin (1984, quoted in Nunan 1992: 81) says that there is also a threat to external validity, which may serve as the major barrier to doing case studies. Yin (1984, quoted by Nunan 1992: 81) defines external validity as the extent to which a particular finding can be generalized beyond the case under investigation. Brown and Rodgers (2002: 45) provide a more detailed definition. For them, external validity concerns the extent to which the researcher can generalize from the case study participant(s) and situation to other people and situations. Yin (1984, quoted in Nunan 1992: 81) has dealt with this potential threat by claiming that case studies seek to make 'analytic' rather than 'statistical' generalizations. This brings to mind Popper's work on falsifiability (Nunan 1992: 81). Case studies, thus are appropriate as a tool for falsifying a particular hypothesis or claim on the grounds that a single disconfirming instance is sufficient to refute a given hypothesis or claim (Nunan 1992: 81).

All in all, construct validity has been a source of criticism because of potential investigator subjectivity. Yin (1994) suggested three possibilities to minimize problems with construct validity: using multiple sources of evidence, establishing a chain of evidence, and having a draft case study report reviewed by key informants (Tellis 1997a).

A frequent criticism of case study methodology is that its dependence on a single case prevents it from providing a generalizing conclusion. Yin (1993, in Tellis 1997a) presented Giddens' view which considered case methodology 'microscopic' because it 'lacked a sufficient number' of cases. Hamel *et al.* (1993, in Tellis 1997a) and Yin (1993, 1994, in Tellis 1997a) forcefully argued that the relative size of the sample, whether 2, 10, or 100 cases are used, does not transform a multiple case into a macroscopic study. The goal of the study should establish the parameters, and then should be applied to all research. In this way, even a single case could be considered acceptable, provided it met the established objective.

For Nunan (1992: 83—85), there are five potential weaknesses concerning single case research, namely:

- ethical objections — treatment or withholding the treatment may raise some ethical doubts;
- practical problems — finding individuals with similar characteristics may be difficult;
- averaging of results — difficulty may arise from an attempt to derive generalizable results and obtain data on specific subjects for diagnosis or remediation;

- generality of findings — related to averaging. As results from group studies do not reflect changes in individuals, it is difficult for the researcher to determine to what extent any given subject is similar to those in the group who showed improvement;
- intersubject variability — an individual may differ in the amount of improvement (some may improve, while others deteriorate or remain stable).

Flyvbjerg (2005: 42—43) addresses five misconceptions about the case study. He points out that it is not true that the case study does not provide reliable results and that it can be used in the initial stage of research, as a kind of a pilot study. Flyvbjerg's discussion concerning the possible drawbacks of the case study is presented below:

1. Theoretical, context-free knowledge is more valuable than concrete, practical and contextualized knowledge. Flyvbjerg (2005: 47) explains that in social studies there is no theoretical, context-free prognostic theory similar to the one that occurs in science. Social studies, because of their focus (i.e. understanding human behaviour), must be based on concrete, contextualized knowledge.
2. One cannot generalize from a single case; therefore the single case study cannot contribute to scientific development. Since it is difficult to generalize on the basis of one single case, case study method does not contribute to the progression of knowledge. Flyvbjerg (2005: 50—51) admits that case study is particularly useful for generalization on the basis of falsification by Karl Popper. Popper's theory of falsifiability is based on the ideas that an assertion can be shown false by an observation or a physical experiment. In other words, if only one of the observations does not fit the theory or the initial hypothesis, then the theory may be considered as inappropriate, and as such must be verified or discarded. Thus, the statement that all swans are white can be falsified if we find one single black swan. In Flyvbjerg's opinion (2005: 51), the case study as a method is particularly useful for the identification of such 'black swans'. Flyvbjerg (2005: 51) further suggests that the importance of formal generalization is overemphasized, whereas the meaning of a single case is often underestimated.
3. The case study is most useful for generating hypotheses, while other methods are more suitable for hypotheses testing and theory building. The case study is more applicable in the initial stage of research for posing hypotheses than in other stages of research where other methods are more useful. Flyvbjerg (2005: 52—53) addresses this point by claiming that cases are important at any stage of the research process. The problem depends on the types of the cases selected. Flyvbjerg (2005: 52—53) provides the types of cases suitable for particular purposes,

namely: extreme cases (unusual, deviant cases which are crucial for reaching the point, understanding the idea often in a dramatic sense). Decisive cases are needed to evaluate the general problem. Flyvberg (2005: 52—53) suggests the strategy of looking for the most probable case or the least probable one so that either of them would help to accept or reject the initial hypothesis). Paradigmatic cases relate to the problem of whether the value of the case is metaphorical or prototypical. In other words, the aim is to establish the range of contexts to which a case is related as well as provide the model example of something).

4. The case study method contains a bias toward verification. Flyvbjerg (2005: 59) claims that falsification, not verification is characteristic for the case study method. If we assume that the aim of the researcher is to understand and acquire some knowledge about the issue, then the case study is a method ensuring deeper understanding by contextualizing the problem.
5. It is often difficult to summarize specific case studies and build theories. Flyvbjerg (2005: 60) admits that case studies often contain the element of narration. The value of narratives lies in the fact that they capture the complexity and ambiguity of real life, and as such, can be difficult to summarize in the form of scientific principles, general statements or formal theories. Peattie (2001, quoted in Flyvbjerg 2005: 61) warns against the summarising of case studies, saying that the strengths of the case study (i.e. contextualized and multidimensional approach to the problem) is lost when one wants to summarize general and complementary issues. Narrative studies give meaning to the situation that we have experienced. They help to anticipate future situations before we have a chance to experience them. They give us the opportunity to imagine future alternatives of various situations. Flyvbjerg (2005: 64) sums up his discussion by saying that well-designed case studies should be read holistically as some kinds of narration.

5. Case study methodology in practice

Yin (2003: 19, 35—39) stresses the fact that while designing case study we need to account for:

a) construct validity — establishing correct operational measures (by selecting appropriate/specific types of changes that are to be studied; demonstrating that the selected measures of changes do indeed reflect selected types of the changes;

b) internal validity — establishing a causal relationship between the conditions (the case of explanatory and descriptive case studies);
c) external validity — establishing a domain to which a study's findings can be generalized (the major obstacle in case study research);
d) reliability — ensuring that data collection techniques can be replicated with the same results (e.g. by detailed documentation of the procedures in particular stages).

5.1. Stages in case studies

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2006) identify the following stages in the case study:
- Start with a wide field of focus;
- Progressive focusing;
- Draft interpretation/report (avoid generalizing too early).

The procedure in single case studies offered by Nunan (1992: 82) involves four stages or phases, which constitute an ABAB design:
- A — Baseline — observations carried out to establish a baseline against which future behaviour can be evaluated. This phase continues until the researcher is satisfied that a stable and reliable measure of the behaviour has been obtained;
- B — Intervention — the teacher or therapist intervenes in some way;
- A — Base — the treatment is withdrawn, and the conditions which existed during phase A are restored. The researcher now wants to know whether the behaviour will remain at the lower level predicted by the intervention phase;
- B — Intervention — the intervention is restored, and the individual's behaviour is observed once more.

5.2. Triangulation

Case studies are often criticized for low generalizability (for details see Section 4.2). That is why, while designing a case study, it is good to realize what kind of conclusions or general findings can be drawn. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2006) point out that we can generalize:
- from the single instance to the class of instances,
- from features of the single case to classes with the same features,
- from the single features of part of the case to the whole of the case.

Another important thing to remember while planning case studies concerns triangulation, understood as the process (processes) of verification

which gives us confidence in our observation. Tellis (1997a) believes that triangulation increases the reliability of the data and the process of gathering them. In the context of data collection, triangulation serves to corroborate the data gathered from other sources.

Denzin (1984, in Tellis 1997b) identified four types of triangulation:

- Data source triangulation, when the researcher looks for the data to remain the same in different contexts;
- Investigator triangulation, when several investigators examine the same phenomenon;
- Theory triangulation, when investigators with different view points interpret the same results;
- Methodological triangulation, when one approach is followed by another, to increase confidence in the interpretation.

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2006) approach the issue of triangulation from slightly different perspective. They enumerated seven possible types of triangulation in case studies:

- Time,
- Place,
- Methodologies,
- Instrumentation,
- Researchers,
- Participants,
- Theory (interpretive paradigms/lenses).

5.3. The role of the researcher

It is often mentioned in the literature that the case study requires a certain preparation and skills on the part of the researcher Yin (2003: 50) specifies that case study researchers should:

- be able to ask good questions and interpret the answers;
- be able to listen attentively (i.e. receive information through different modalities) and objectively (i.e. without ideologies and preconceptions, assimilating large amounts of information without bias);
- be adaptive and flexible (i.e. willing to modify research procedures and adapt to unplanned situations);
- have a firm grasp of the issues under investigation;
- be unbiased by the preconceived notions or theories.

Stake (1995, in Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2006) focuses on the roles of researcher in case studies. The roles are as follows:

- teacher, advocate, evaluator, biographer, interpreter.

6. Examples of case studies in ELT literature

Nunan (1992: 78) claims that the case study is often implemented in first language acquisition and second language learning. The most common issues that are examined concern the language development of first and second language learners (see Lois Bloom's study presented in details in Section 6.1.) as well as the impact of individual variables on progress in language learning (e.g. Schumann's s longitudinal study of Alberto, a 33-year-old Costa Rican, who made little progress in learning English and did not adapt to the new culture despite intensive instruction — Nunan 1992: 79).

A case study can also be applied in education as a method to deal with unique, exceptional students or students with special educational needs (for details, see the study of Laura and Christopher — Sections 6.2 and 6.3, respectively, or Jarosz 2006, Frankowska 2008).

6.1. Negation — Lois Bloom's study

Lois Bloom's longitudinal study of three children: Kathryn, Gia, and Eric, included a detailed analysis of the development of negation when they were less than three years old. The children learned the functions of negation very early. That is, they learned to deny, reject, disagree with, and refuse something. However, even though they had this awareness of how negation functions, it took some time before they learned the grammatical rules to express these negative functions. The following stages in the development of negation have been observed (Lightbown and Spada 1999: 5—6).

Stage 1
The child's first negatives are usually expressed by the word 'no', either all alone or as the first word in the utterance:

No go. No cookie. No comb hair.

Some children even adopt the word 'any' as a negator, perhaps with an accompanying shake of the head:

Any bath!

Stage 2
As utterances grow longer, and the sentence subject is included, the negative usually appears just before the verb:

Daddy no comb hair.

Stage 3
At this stage, the negative element is inserted into a more complex sentence. Children may add forms of the negative other than *no*, including words like *can't* and *don't*. These sentences appear to follow the correct English patterns of attaching the negative to the auxiliary or modal verb. However, the negative words do not yet vary these forms for different persons or tenses:

I can't do it. He don't want it.

Stage 4
Later, children begin to attach the negative element to the correct form of auxiliary verbs such as 'do' and 'be', and modal verbs such as 'can':

You didn't have supper. She doesn't want it.

They may still have difficulty with some other features related to negatives:

I don't have no more candies.

6.2. Laura — a study of a retarded girl

Laura was a retarded young woman with a nonverbal IQ of 41—44. She lacked almost all number concepts, including basic counting principles, could draw only at a preschool level and had an auditory memory span limited to three units. Yet, when at the age of sixteen she was asked to name some fruits, she responded with *pears*, *apples*, and *pomegranates*. In this same period she produced syntactically complex sentences like:

He was saying that I lost my battery-powered watch that I loved

and

Last year at school when I first went there, three tickets were gave out by a police last year.

Laura could not add 2 + 2. She was not sure of when 'last year' was or whether it was before or after 'last week' or 'an hour ago', nor did she know how many tickets were 'gave out', nor whether three was larger or smaller than two. Nevertheless, Laura produced complex sentences with multiple phrases. She used and understood passive sentences, and she was able to inflect verbs for number and person to agree with the subject of the sentence. She formed past tenses in accord with adverbs that referred to past time. She could do all this and more, but she could neither read not write nor tell time. She did not know who the President of the United States was or what country she lived in or even her own age. Her drawings of humans resembled potatoes with stick arms and legs. Yet, in a sentence imitation task, she both detected and corrected grammatical errors (Fromkin, Rodman and Hyams 2003: 49—50).

Fromkin, Rodman and Hyams (2003: 49—50) state that Laura is one of many examples of children who display well-developed grammatical abilities, less-developed abilities to associate linguistic expressions with the objects they refer to, and severe deficits in nonlinguistic cognitive development. They add that any notion that linguistic competence results simply from communicative abilities, or develops to serve communication functions, is belied by studies of children with good linguistic skills, but nearly no communicative skills. The acquisition and use of language seem to depend on cognitive skills different from the ability to communicate in a social setting.

6.3. Christopher — a boy of outstanding linguistic capabilities

Christopher has a nonverbal IQ between 60 and 70 and must live in an institution because he is unable to take care of himself. The tasks of buttoning a shirt, cutting his fingernails, or vacuuming the carpet are too difficult for him. However, linguists find that his 'linguistic competence in this first language is as rich and as sophisticated as that of any native speaker'. Furthermore, when given written texts in some fifteen to twenty languages, he translates them quickly, with few errors, into English. The languages include Germanic languages such as Danish, Dutch, and German; Romance languages such a French, Italian, Portuguese, and Spanish; as well as Polish, Finnish, Greek, Hindi, Turkish, and Welsh. He learned these languages from speakers who used them in his presence, or from grammar books. Christopher loves to study and learn languages. Little else is of interest to him. His situation strongly suggests that his linguistic ability is

independent of his general intellectual ability (Fromkin, Rodman and Hyams 2003: 50).

Fromkin, Rodman and Hyams (2003: 50) conclude that the cases of Laura and Christopher argue against the view that linguistic ability derives from general intelligence, since for these two individuals language is developed in spite of other intellectual deficits.

7. Summing up

Summing up, we can say that despite the difficulty (both in design and interpretation), case study research is one of the most attractive styles of research for the first-time researcher. Its attractiveness lies in the organizational and reporting styles which tend to be less formal than in other types of the research as well as the readiness of participants to contribute (Brown and Rodgers 2002: 51).

The case study is also attractive to educational researchers because it raises a variety of issues. Finally, case studies are attractive to readers and people working in different contexts. Winter (1988, in Devereux, Eyres and Price 2001: 345) summarizes his views by saying that case studies have the form of a plurality of 'voices', and writers can organize the data to bring out the discrepancies and contradictions. Additionally, the material in case studies can be presented as a story that does not require the reader to accept it, but anticipates a continuing analytical response from the reader who, in a way, becomes a collaborator in the research process. This, in turn, may lead to action research and/or encourage professional development.

8. Questions and tasks

Q.1. Go back to Section 4. Analyse the arguments and select three pros and cons that you find the most convincing.

Q.2. Select one of the case studies presented in Section 6. Determine the research questions that triggered the study and identify research instruments that allowed one to gather such data. Then, evaluate the case study of your choice by enumerating the strong and weak points of it.

Task 1. Design a case study procedure for: a) a dyslectic student or b) an ADHD student. Identify three research questions and decide upon the research tools that you are going to use. The steps enumerated below will help in designing your case study:
- Determine and define the research questions
- Select the cases and determine data gathering and analysis techniques
- Prepare to collect the data
- Collect data in the field
- Evaluate and analyze the data
- Prepare the report (source: Stake, Simons and Yin, in Soy 1997).

Task 2. Conduct a 24-hour case study of yourself reporting all communication strategies that you use while interacting in your mother tongue. Before conducting the self-case study, browse the literature (e.g. Ellis 1994) to familiarize yourself with the typology of communication strategies. Observe yourself and note down the examples of communication strategies that you have implemented. Pay special attention to the following problems:
- the types of communication strategies you have resorted to,
- situations in which you are most likely to implement communication strategies,
- some variables that have affected your performance.

Report your findings and samples of language behaviour to your class of students, your partner, colleague, etc. What general conclusions can you draw from this study? Having experienced self-case study, how would you evaluate this method?

Task 3. Select a case study from the ELT literature. Discuss the research problems and procedure implemented.

Additional reading

Nunan D., 1992: *Research Methods in Language Learning.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. The book focuses on various research methodologies that can be implemented in language studies. It starts with an introduction to research methods and traditions, which is then followed by chapters devoted to subsequent research methods. Such organization of the book provides a spectrum of possibilities that a researcher can choose from and allows us to select each research method appropriately.

Richards J.C. and Farrell T.S.C., 2005: *Professional Development for Language Teachers.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. The book offers a slightly different perspective on the case study, namely as a tool for teacher professional development, which links case study methods with action research. The value of the book lies in its presenting some wider background for the method (i.e. brief history and the application of the method).

Simons H., 2009: *Case Study Research in Practice.* London: Sage Publications. Simons concentrates on qualitative case study, which she also refers to as 'instance in action' (after MacDonald and Walker) or 'authenticated anecdote' (MacDonald), and presents the complexity of this research method. Simons focuses on the educative process of case study research suggesting that this is appropriate methodology for exploring problems of educational practice.

Wallace M.J., 1998: *Action Research for Language Teachers.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. A practical approach to the case study is presented together with a lot of suggestions and ideas for how to conduct case studies in practice.

Yin R., 2003: *Case Study Research. Design and Methods. 3rd edition* London: Sage Publications (website: http://www.scribd.com/doc/3289743/Yin-Case-study-research-3rd). This is an extensive step by step description of case study research. It presents the case study approach mostly in social and psychological contexts. Certain concepts, e.g. related to validity and reliability, are thoroughly described and supported by examples. Worth mentioning is the fact that Yin is the author of several books and articles in the area of case study methodology.

References

Brown J.D. and Rodgers T.S., 2002: *Doing Second Language Research.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Child D., 2007: *Psychology and the Teacher. 8th edition.* New York: Continuum International Publishing Group.

Cohen L., Manion L. and Morrison K., 2006: *Research Methods in Education.* London: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, A Routledge Companion Website. www.routledge.com/textbooks/9780415368780 — link: resources for chapters 11—15, Chapter 11, file 11.1.

Devereux J., Eyres I. and Price M., 2001: "Exploring the value of action research methodologies: three case studies". In: F. Banks and A. Shelton Mayes (eds) *Early Professional Development for Teachers.* London: The Open University, 345—363.

Ellis R., 1994: *The Study of Second Language Acquisition.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Flyvbjerg B., 2005: "Pięć mitów o badaniach typu studium przypadku". In: *Studia Socjologiczne* 2005, 2 (117), 41—69.

Frankowska A. 2008: "Case study — Teaching Blind Children". *Humanising Language Teaching. Issue 2, April 2008.* Retrieved from www.hltmag.co.uk, accessed 27.07.2009.

Fromkin V., Rodman R. and Hyams N., 2003: *An Introduction to Language. 7th edition.* Boston: Thomson Wadsworth.

Jarosz A., 2006: "Teaching children with ADHD". *Humanising Language Teaching* 5, September 2006. Retreived from www.hltmag.co.uk, accessed 27. 07.2009.

Jendrych E. and Wiśniewska H., 2009: "Dlaczego nie *case study* — studium przypadku?". *Języki Obce w Szkole* 3/2009, 42—46.

Lightbown P.M. and Spada N., 1999: *How Languages are Learned.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Łobocki M., 2006: *Metody i techniki badań pedagogicznych.* Kraków: Oficyna Wydawnicza „Impuls".

Nunan D., 1992: *Research Methods in Language Learning.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Reber A.S. and Reber E., 2001: *The Penguin Dictionary of Psychology.* London: Penguin Group.

Reichelt M., 2000: "Case studies in L2 teacher education". *ELT Journal* vol. 54/4, 346—353.

Richards J.C. and Farrell T.S.C., 2005: *Professional Development for Language Teachers.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Richards J.C., Platt J. and Platt H., 1992: *Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics.* Harlow: Longman Group Limited.

Seliger H.W. and Shohamy E., 1989: *Second Language Research Methods.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Soy S., 1997: "The case study as a research method". Retrieved from: http://faculty.uccb.ns.ca/pmacintyre/course_pages/MBA603/MBA603_files/T he%20Case%20Study%20as%20a%20Research%20Method.pdf, accessed 27.07.2009.

Tellis W., 1997a: "Introduction to case study". In: *The Qualitative Report*, Vol. 3, Number 2, July 1997, retrieved from: http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR3- 2/tellis1.html, accessed 27.07.2009.

Tellis W., 1997b: "Application of a case study methodology". In: *The Qualitative Report*, Vol. 3, Number 3, 1997, retrieved from: http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR3-3/tellis2.html, accessed 27.07.2009.

Wallace M.J., 1998: *Action Research for Language Teachers.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Walliman N., 2001: *Your Research Project. A Step-by-Step Guide for the First-Time Researcher.* London: SAGE Publications.
Yin R., 2003: *Case Study Research. Design and Methods. 3rd edition.* London: Sage Publications, retrieved from: http://www.scribd.com/doc/3289743/Yin-Case-study-research-3rd, accessed 27.07.2009.
Yin R.K., 2004: "Case study methods", retrieved from: http://www.cosmoscorp.com/Docs/AERAdraft.pdf, accessed 27.07.2009.

Grażyna Kiliańska-Przybyło

Studium przypadku

Streszczenie

Rozdział poświęcony został metodzie badawczej określanej jako studium przypadku lub analiza przypadku. Studium przypadku, jako przykład badania jakościowego, zmierza do szczegółowej i wieloaspektowej analizy życia danej jednostki (przypadku) lub zjawiska w celu ich opisania, znalezienia diagnozy lub podjęcia działań terapeutycznych. Jej głównym celem jest zrozumienie, a nie wartościowanie. Z metodologicznego punktu widzenia, studium przypadku stanowi przykład badania celowego, planowego i długotrwałego, w którym stosuje się wielorakie narzędzia zbierania danych, m.in. obserwację, wywiad czy analizę dokumentów. Pozornie łatwa, metoda analizy przypadku wymaga odpowiedniego przygotowania i wiedzy badacza. Niniejszy rozdział skupia się na szczegółowej charakterystyce i ocenie tej metody, uwzględniającej typy oraz miejsce studium przypadku w kontekście innych metod badawczych, np. eksperymentu czy badania sondażowego. Kolejny element rozdziału stanowią wskazówki praktyczne dotyczące etapów planowania i przeprowadzenia badań, reguł jakich należy przestrzegać oraz roli badacza. Całości dopełniają przykłady studium przypadków z dziedziny badań nad językiem.

Grażyna Kiliańska-Przybyło

Die Fallstudie

Zusammenfassung

Das Kapitel ist der Forschungsmethode gewidmet, die als Fallstudie oder Fallanalyse bezeichnet ist. Als eine qualitative Forschung wollte sie, auf eine ausführliche und vielseitige Weise, das Leben von einem Individuum (einem Fall) oder einem Phänomen untersuchen und beschreiben, damit eine Diagnose gestellt und entsprechende Therapie angewandt werden können. Das Hauptziel der Methode ist ein Bewusstwerden und nicht eine Bewertung. Methodologisch gesehen ist die Fallstudie ein Beispiel für zweckmäßige, geplante und lang dauernde Untersuchung, in der verschiedenerlei Methoden der Datengewinnung, u. a.: Beobachtung, Interview oder Dokumentenanalyse verwendet

werden. Die scheinbar leichte Methode der Fallstudie bedarf von dem Forscher geeigneter Vorbereitung und Kenntnisse. Sie wird von der Verfasserin ausführlich charakterisiert und beurteilt. Es werden hier verschiedene Typen und die Rolle der Fallstudie angesichts der anderen Forschungsmethoden (z.B.: Experiment o. Befragung) gezeigt. Die Verfasserin gibt auch einige praktische Hinweise: wie die Forschung auf den einzelnen Stufen geplant und durchgeführt werden sollte, welche Regel zu beachten sind, was zu Aufgaben des Forschers gehört. Das Kapitel wird noch mit den Beispielen der Fallstudie im Bereich der Sprachwissenschaft ergänzt.